

The Sky Is Blue

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 3 | Aired on 07.27.2008

So, everybody lived through last week's assault and now they're back to freaking out constantly about getting back into the action. Bravo keeps going, but they get stuck at a roadside watching as the ROE degrades further and further. An RCT unit, operating off randomly bad intel, starts blowing up a small hamlet, and totally ignore Iceman and Nate's explanations in favor of wholesale slaughter.

Then the Company heads to Ar Rifa, where Encino Man awesomely surpasses last week's Bones-level dumbness by a factor of ten when he calls in an artillery strike on top of his own men in order to stop an imaginary team of bad guys. Fick gets physical, a little bit, trying to stop him from calling it in, but lets it slide once he realizes that Encino Man's too dumb to even order it right. So on the one hand, Fick's insubordination is now a matter of record, which is bad, but Encino Man failed in blowing up the entire Company, which is good.

Also acting wonderfully freaky is Captain America, who is now looting the bodies of everybody he kills for souvenirs and is still busily imagining all kinds of crazy nonexistent shit. Godfather once again ignores sensible strategy and pushes his men to attack an abandoned Republican Army airstrip, in order to kiss General Mattis's ass some more. They easily take the field, but the casualties include a camel and a little boy, whose mother brings him to Doc Bryan for care. Unable to get the Battalion to allow him to evacuate the kid, with the clock ticking, Doc Bryan decides to tend his wounds outside Ferrando's tent, thinking that maybe watching a child die will snap him out of his weird bureaucratic grooming standard fantasy. The answer is no, but he acquits himself well as far as the logistics of why the kid needs to die.

Brad is embarrassed enough that he very nearly apologizes to Evan for even being in the service, and runs off to cry about how stupid and frustrating it is dealing with his superiors, who are becoming more horrible each day that passes. This episode is like if you put the book in a juicer and squeezed out everything that can and should piss you off about the war and about people and made it into a delicious anger smoothie. Sometimes there's just no good to be had.

Everybody's running around getting ready for the next thing even though they don't know what the next thing is going to be. The sunrise or sunset in the opening crane shot is lovely. The visual language of this show is so evocative, because you can't exactly go directly to the jittery *Black Hawk Down* place, but you can't really do like a romance with it either, so they just mix it up in the coolest way, like the whole sunset speech from Godfather last week: totally inspiring in the eyeballs, fake inspiring in the earholes, and then a kind of dread.

Everybody calls everything a donkey dick like a billion times and Dirty Earl can be heard claiming that he can fix "anything from a screen door to a broken heart." That's poetic. Especially because they don't have screen doors here. They barely have *door* doors here. Brad's harassing Trombley about his biology, once again: "Trombley, did you eat? You hydrated? Defecated?" Trombley has not yet defecated. As Casey Kasem oilslicks his disgusting slugtrail self toward them, Ray bitches about something breaking. Brad begs Trombley to shit before they get on the road.

"Outstanding job yesterday, gentlemen," smarms Casey Kasem. Brad's like, "Can I help you? To suck my cock?" Casey Kasem gets that look they get when they think

they're being lofty and kinglike, aka the worst fucking thing you ever wanted to smash into a billion places, and wheezes, "Sergeant, yesterday we had a trial by fire. I want you to know, Brad, that I'm here for you and your men. Are there any combat stress reactions anyone needs to talk about? Remember, I'm the certified combat stress instructor." Meanwhile, ironically enough, Walt's freaking out over his broken gun, giving Brad the usual entrée to point out to Casey Kasem that he is a rancid blumpkin of a person.

"No, we're good, Gunny. But we would be a lot *better* if you were getting us the gun lube and batteries we need. *That* might do it for my combat stress." Just the slightest Iceman tone in there where you couldn't actually accuse him of being an asshole -- after all, it's true, I mean, he's saying the sky's blue, basically -- but this being their eighty-fifth conversation about Casey Kasem's fucking inability to do the one thing he's tasked with, it's kind of implied. Walt's like, "My combat stress too. Ass." Casey Kasem runs off without even saying anything, because what do you say? "Yep, there it is. The eighty-fifth time did the trick. I have finally realized what a skidmark I am. Here are your batteries. And some chocolate." He passes by Whisky Tango Chaffin, and they engage in asshole chat.

Brad and Walt share a moment about how sad it is that Walt's gun is so effed up and needs this totally necessary grit-resistant lubricant called LSA, and Nate climbs up beside them. "Lieutenant Sir, the main weapon on your point vehicle is unreliable. Given the prevailing climatic conditions, using this lubricant is like trying to buttfuck a virgin underaged Phuket whore with chalk when KY is clearly called for, sir." This last sounds very Swedish, for the first time. "You'll have to deal with it, Sergeant. We have four more towns to assault through today." Brad gives him this look like, "Aww, I didn't actually expect you to *do* anything, I was just being adorable." Nate jumps down: "You want logistics, join the Army. Marines make do." Walt and Brad are like whatever, Casey Kasem is a fucker.

Doc's on a Humvee oiling his... gun parts or something when Casey Kasem approaches them to spread a little bit more of his fuckin' sunshine. "Marines, I just want you to know the Company Commander feels that it was our team that scored the touchdown yesterday for Godfather! He runs off like Doc Bryan, of all people, was waiting for that news, and Doc sighs. "Of course Godfather's happy. He's trying to get his full bird on our backs." This is something of a theme with Doc, officers getting medals and promotions based on bad ideas, but as usual, Doc's never wrong. I mean, think about it: take a risky shot and nail it, you're golden; take a risky shot and it doesn't work out, plausible deniability and a possible commendation for trying. But they're never the ones on the line, are they?

Q-Tip doesn't even care because at least he got to bust his cherry, but Doc's not hearing what he's saying. Because what Q-Tip is saying is, "Generation Kill. Right here. Officers make choices, that's what they do. I want to shoot motherfuckers. They make choices so that happens, I love them. They hold me back, fuck them. This is a good thing we're hearing, because it means more action." But, thinking

Q-Tip doesn't also understand his point, Doc explains further: "My point is, we gotta follow Godfather wherever he leads, no matter how fucked up it happens to be." Pappy agrees, and Q-Tip's like, "Whatev. You're not hearing me. Generation Kill. No matter how fucked up it happens to be? *Cool*. That's why we're here. That's as far as I'm willing to go with that line of thought."

"Stafford, yesterday we ran the gauntlet with no ass and no air, and for what?" Evan walks up, curious about Doc's rant as he should be. "Fuckin' artillery blew the shit outta that town *after* we rolled through it." And yet, Q-Tip got to shoot people, so what's the problem? "We're Reconnaissance Marines," says Pappy. "Swift, silent and deadly." A random man gives a random hoorah. "And Godfather knows this. And he knows when he sends us into the shit, like yesterday, we'll probably come out on top. Because we're the best." Evan nods. "But that don't make it right."

Doc looks down at Evan: "Hey Beaver Hunt, why are you even here? I mean, after yesterday any cognizant person with a speck of common sense would have caught the first truck south." Evan sighs, blows out his cheeks; it's the opposite of sucking wind. He doesn't know. But it's not like Evan's the only person who should be answering the question.

Everybody uses a munitions box with a hole cut in the top when they want to take a crap. In public. That's awful on many levels simultaneously. So Trombley, having defecated per his Sergeant's orders, hands Q-Tip's back to him with a muttered thanks. "Yo! Yo, son, you shit on my shitter!" Gross? Trombley's like, "Um, wipe it off? We're in the desert and times are tough?" but Q-Tip's not having it. He tosses the thing roughly at Trombley's chest. I'm going to need you boys to just put it down on the ground while you're having this conversation. My God. "Trombley, this shitter's the only luxury I got out here!" (Back to the basics of biology and the mustaches again; you see the same thing in prisoners: whatever you have, that's what the world becomes.) The guys laugh, and Q-Tip looks at them for a second with a quiet "Screwby" before running off.

Trombley is, once again, ashamed and unused to having his bowels controlled by a bunch of yelling people, and takes off. "Devil Dog, your aim sucks!" shouts Pappy, and somebody on his team is like, "If Lance Corporal Trombley's as good with his SAW as he is with his shitter, I think Team One has issues..." It's so backwards and creepy and... I get it, I mean, find what the kid's weird about and push the button, except it's still so gross. I hate Trombley, he scares the piss out of me because he's so real, but what really scares me is the way they're always at him, all of them, because he's the FNG, and it's like: "Did you not notice that he is a fucking psycho? And kind of stupid? And a killer shot?" Any cognizant person not in the military would be telling him how great he's doing, not messing around with his head all the time. Not even out of kindness, just to spare the world another McVeigh. He's got a crack through him you can see from a billion miles away and it has to do with this stuff: manhood, weirdness about being out in all this, feeling left out even when he's not,

and being unacquainted with reality on a basic level in the first place. Whatever's on the other side of Generation Kill, that's Trombley.

Commanders tent. Patterson asks if they're going to be rolling through the planned towns with a lot of heavy accompaniment, and Godfather nods. "Yes, Captain. We got kudos directly from General Mattis, I might add..." Sixta's retard bobblehead goes flopping all over the place "...For punching through yesterday where RCT-1 failed to go. But now, it looks like we're back to being one unit among many. And unfortunately, when we're rolling with the Regimental Combat Team, we can get lost in the middle of all that ass. The only way we're gonna get back into the game and score like we did yesterday is to find another mission where we can break off. And Captain Patterson, you can depend on Godfather to look for any opportunity to get us back into the game." Not that Patterson fucking asked. Meanwhile, Encino Man makes that horrible moto face he makes, like, "Yay, George! I understood that part! Possibly!" Godfather repeats himself a bit, and then says some dry and pithy phrases.

Brad's in his Humvee when Nate comes running up with a "present": "LSA. Scammed some off the guys in RCT-1." Brad offers to kiss Nate, not in a gay way you understand, and Nate laughs and takes off. Brad hands the lube over to Walt, who's overjoyed to be back in the business of killing some motherfuckers. Endquote.

Ray starts the engine; the company rolls. Going through fields, there are guys jumping and hopping around at the roadside, yelling stuff. Brad's creeped out, and Ray's like, "Yeah, those guys waving at us are probably the same ones who tried to kill us yesterday." Bit later, they drive by a Humvee that looks like it was put in the microwave oven until it melted. Even Ray is impressed. "Hit with RPGs," Brad says, so we'll know later what that means. (RPG = awesome.) "Yeah, a buddy of mine in One Seven had to fucking clean up a Humvee that got hit like that. Said he found the driver's fingers in the engine compartment," says Ray. After a sec, Evan looks up. "How did they know they were the driver's fingers?" Because they were still gripping the steering wheel, fucknuts. Evan's like um, okay. First of all, whoa, and second of all, why so pissy today?

Trombley looks at the wild dogs in the fields and once again his thoughts turn fondly to shooting them for no reason. Ray shakes his head, because he's smart enough to know that Trombley sucks, and he's also enough of a USMC Mean Girl to toe the line and show him scorn whenever possible. I don't understand why Ray never gets bullied. He's fairly begging for it, like, every second. "Trombley, I keep telling you we don't shoot dogs. We shoot people." Not even that last bit cheers Trombley up, much less the booming foreshadowing. "And we generally only shoot people if we have to."

There's this face Trombley makes, whenever people say shit that makes obvious sense. "We only shoot people when we have to," for example. It's like he's getting punished, or upbraided, but it's always stuff that has neutral value. Like if I said to you, "The sky is blue," and you were like, "GET OFF MY BACK!" And all through this

episode it kept making me want to stomp him. But then at the end I realized that, as far as he's concerned, you *are* hurting his feelings, because he's like this detuned radio that's only getting whatever Columbine frequency that makes him tick, so if the sky is green in his world, telling him it's blue actually is fucking with him. And because he's the FNG (and a child of nineteen), anybody who says anything to him is some kind of authority, in one way or another, which means he *is* getting punished. He's got these Captain America/received-wisdom ideas about what the military is about, and they are *so wrong*, but if you try to explain what the military is actually like, you kind of *are* being a dick, subjectively speaking. And the *really* scary thing is that he is *so good at shooting people and killing them* that this schizoid approach is not even really a concern.

"...I'm afraid of dogs," Trombley offers, after awhile. Ray laughs. "You're afraid of dogs? What, were you bitten in your formative years?" Evan laughs quietly, because Evan laughs at everything Ray says, because if we didn't have Evan's reaction shots every five seconds we might notice that Ziggy's still a subpar actor with moments of genius. "My dad was once," Trombley offers in a schoolyard tone. "Dog bit him and my dad jammed his hand down the dog's throat, ripped up his fucking stomach." He tells this lie like they're going to be impressed, but because they're not teenagers, they don't actually care. I mean, maybe it's not a lie, but it sucks the same way as though it were. *dood thats so fuking hardcorre thats some faces of deth shit right there like yr old man mst hav fuckn balls of steel i bet*. Ray whispers quietly, in a fearful and still disgusted tone, "Where did we find this guy, man?" Trombley tries again: "I like cats." Still not getting the response he wants, not even from Evan, not even after trying three different ways to get them to look him in the eye, he sighs and stares out the window. Something else, then. Something he's good at.

Tall grass on either side, then a small village. They keep saying "hamlet" which always makes me think of Doonesbury in the Viet Nam years. What is a hamlet? My mom was getting her Masters when I was a kid and she used to read me all her assignments, but I was so young I didn't really process a lot of it. I thought Hamlet and Prince Rillian were the same guy for like ten years, that's all I remember. Oh, and Oedipus and King Lear and the guy from Rapunzel all got blinded, so I drew these weird connections and decided that people get blinded constantly if they don't watch out. (I still kind of believe that one.) I also thought Jesus, Napoleon and Hannibal had a huge war in Israel, in which they rode principally on the backs of giant elephants, and this took place sometime around The Pyramids, BC. History was a lot cooler when I was stupid.

Sorry, what's a hamlet. A hamlet is defined as "smaller than a village," which is itself "smaller than a town." Okay, that mystery was not very mysterious, as it turns out. So Brad and Patterson are watching this hamlet, which is doing nothing interesting unless you find poverty stricken civilian families with children going about their fucking business in a war-torn nation and not doing anything to hurt anybody particularly interesting. The word for father is "Abooy"; the word for mother is "Um-mi." These kids would say "Baba" and "Mama." The word for milk is "haleb."

"Remember how the kids would come running out to us in Afghanistan?" Patterson grunts in agreement. Nate radios out that there's no enemy presence anywhere; Captain America is looting bodies for beanies, keepsakes. Lilley tapes him, from a distance: "Winning the war one souvenir at a time, right? ...Fucking scumbag, man." Espera barks, "Hey! That's Bravo Three's Commander." They all hoot and laugh into the silence, and watch him with the bodies. Down on their bellies, Brad looks up and sees Captain America approaching. His eyes, they don't focus on anything. They're bifocal, they see something we don't see. I imagine it's a cartoon as big as the world. "Sergeant! For the life of me," he laughs in that conspiratorial, stilted and awkward way he has, "I could only find a black one. Have you located any red ones?" Kocher, staring at him unmoving from his assigned post, admits he hasn't found any hats on dead men's heads for him. "If you do, you'll be sure to let me know?" Cap nods gratefully -- and still commandingly, which is the single greatest thing about the motherfucker. He's commanding entire regiments with this shit, from inside his spooky old head -- and runs off. Brad smiles and laughs sympathetically, but Patterson can barely manage that. The sky is very big, and very blue, overhead.

Q-Tip is training Christeson in the use of... one very large piece of ballistics equipment. I don't know. If I called it a donkey dick do you think they'd notice? Christeson judges the nearest hut to be about a hundred or hundred twenty meters away. I guess he's super new at this particular kind of BFG, because Q-Tip says that's not bad, it's 225. That sounds not very right to me. He's sketching, all the time. "See that beehive-shaped thing? Where they cook their bread. It's always gonna show hot on the thermal..." He flips the sketch over: it's beautiful, a detailed charcoal of the hut and its shadows. His hands create beauty. It's a portrait of before. They're in an old, old place. "It's all about the windows and doors, man. Entrances and exits." Christeson stares at the beautiful thing Stafford made, just while they've been lying here in the dirt, pretending to kill families, rehearsing for the moment. "Screwby," he says breathlessly. Q-Tip is proud. Stafford is a killer/Stafford is an artist. Screwby. Everything is quiet, and hot. Kocher says Brad's name, quietly. "I'm, uh... concerned about Captain America." Brad nods, with import. It's enough to worry, until the next thing. Then it's over.

RCT-1 trucks come rolling up; the guys all jump out and start firing on the hamlet immediately, running in front of Recon, screaming orders, lighting the houses up, "What the fuck? We don't have comms for that unit," Brad screams: "Fuck, that's women and children. Cease fire! Cease fire! Do not engage!" and over at the berm, Q-Tip looks up, concerned; Christeson starts to aim, going along with the sound and the fury and Q-Tip shoves him down, irritated, and out of the Humvees comes Captain America fumbling, comms phone still clipped to his shirt so he clotheslines himself, and nearly gets dropped on his ass in the dirt, but his weapon's at the ready the entire time, and Brad's screaming orders, pleas, anywhere and everywhere, pointing his voice anywhere it will go, as all around him they're erupting, gleefully: "All Hitman Victors, we've been observing this hamlet, it's only women and children,

do not engage; Sir, they're shooting that hamlet in error! Sir, we don't have any comms with RCT-1 and they're shooting that hamlet in error!" Who knows who he's yelling at anymore, but everybody ignores him, lighting it up under a blue sky; Encino Man opens up with a grin on his face and somebody clears a missile and it takes out everything - *everything* -- and Pappy asks on comms who cleared it but nobody can hear him but Nate, and Nate doesn't know, and the building is just burning wreckage but the men keep shooting, and Pappy asks if there were bad guys, but nobody answers him, and Nate just says: "Unaware at this time."

Patterson stares at the ruins, smoking and burnt, they were watching a second ago. Breakfast and laundry and the songs little kids sing. "They fucking got good effect on target," he grunts bitterly, echoed by the radio. Brad watches it all fall down.

Espera offers Evan some dip and another speech. "Dog, we was like thirteen or fourteen, and we were pedaling around in this neighborhood I grew up in, just east of LA? We saw some cholos from another hood and we thought we was all hard gangbanger wannabes. So we started saying 'Fuck off, yo! Fuck off!' Throwing, flashing signs to them and stuff. So they started throwing down on us, kicking our little asses. Then some of the older dogs from our hood come out, grabbed those fools, took one behind the Tastee Freez... They stabbed him up with a screwdriver. Killed that cholo." Evan's not entirely sure he understands the point of this little story. "See generally, white people, they don't drag a dude behind the Tastee Freez and stab him to death with a screwdriver." Evan laughs, not entirely sure whether he's allowed to laugh. "So after that day I decided, I'm gonna hang with white people." That is hilarious. "Well... Here you are?" Evan spots Chaffin going by, and asks if he has the picture of his girlfriend: "Straight blonde hair, brown eyes?" Chaffin's got a good poker face: "She have a big stain on her face?" Poke laughs quietly behind Evan, who's like, "Um, no? What?" Chaffin shakes his head. "Haven't seen her."

Team leaders' meeting. Nate shows them a town on the map, Ar Rifa, that runs along the road for 2 km, population 75 thousand: their mission is to drive past it. Simple, right? Espera asks what happens after that, and Nate says same thing with the town after that. Which is, I guess, sort of like reconnaissance. Or a lovely drive along country roads. Albeit country roads that sometimes blow you up or shoot things into your head and organs. Not, like, a picnic.

"Sir, in that last hamlet, all it took was one shot. That was just an undisciplined grunt from RCT-1. Everybody opened up and schwacked it over nothing." Espera's like, Yo McNulty, cram it. "We could only keep our own honor clean, Dog. What these other motherfuckers do in this big wide A-O ain't on us." Which is, in a way, something Brad and Nate ought to be reminded of right now: their men didn't shoot. This guy with a face like a smooshed-face lion that's always with Captain America is like, "Yeah, it's hard enough just keeping our own guys out of the shit. We can't be worrying about the rest of the world." Fuck. Off. Do you think these guys ever hear themselves saying this stuff and then they're like, "That sounds like an asshole just said that." Right, because without categorical accountability or the intelligence and

guidance of men like Fick and Colbert you'd just be a bunch of drugged-up mentally abused sleep-deprived killing machines without any ethical check on your actions or control-group rationality at all and *wouldn't that just be so fucking weird*.

Brad's not going to shut up, in true McNulty style: "I *know* you all saw our own CO try to fire off a 203 round in the middle of all that." They all give and admit that, yes, Encino Man is bullshit and went all Kill Crew for no reason, but you can hardly blame him because instead of a brain he uses Vegemite, and anyway, of course, he fucking missed. Brad starts to bitch and moan some more, and Nate -- boasting some *nasty* razor burn -- cuts him off, because there's not even a point right now, because the sky is green right this second, because he's in an impossible position: "-- Look, Brad, can't live in the past. You need to snap to. We got a lot of shit ahead of us."

Brad snaps to, because he's right, but he's still sad because sometimes Marines forget to be awesome, and he tries never to do that. But the sky-blue sky here and now is that Brad was standing in the middle of a shooting gallery begging them to stop, and nobody could hear him. Like a nightmare" mouth open, nothing coming out. Little kids died, because he couldn't shout loudly enough.

Espera worries there's an RPG unit in the town, and stresses that his concerns are, by comparison, reasonable. Then everybody's shouting: Pappy's asking Nate if he wants a sniper team to set up for the imaginary RPG unit, and Captain America's screaming Nate's name over and over for no goddamn reason ("Nate! Nate! Nate! Nate! Nate! Nate! Nate! Nate! Nate! Nate!") and Nate's about had it, so he turns to Brad. Wouldn't you? "Push security out farther. Let's make the best of this." The teams mobilize.

Mere centimeters away, Encino Man slowly pulls out his phone. "I'm gonna call this one in right now," he says, and Smoosh-Face goes, "Sir, that's a cunt hair over 200 meters, sir. That's danger close for artillery." Encino Man does that Caveman Lawyer thing where it's like he's trying to decipher a strange new culture: "Danger close?" He talks so slow sometimes when he's confused, it's like Swamp Thing. Clayface is super sad, and finally pulls out *Obvious Words For Dummies* or something and shows it to him: "Sir, 'danger close' is an artillery strike within 600 meters of a friendly position." Somebody points that he's talking about "us," there, and Face is all, "200 meters ... That's pretty much on top of our heads." Encino Man tries desperately to understand. Doc Bryan gets his face all in his big dumb grill: "You dumb motherfucker, sir, even the most boot-fucked Marine knows danger close." Casey Kasem, Springfield's answer to a question no one asked, starts screaming all Sixta-style: "You're way outta line!"

Nate comes running up and asks what the fuck is going on and why Encino Man hasn't been on comms for the last five things that happened that were actually real and not totally in his stupid fucked up head. "I'm calling in a fire mission," Encino Man says, perseverating on the last words his crumpled Vegemite were able to grasp. "Sir, I don't like this," Doc says quietly. "These two get their fucking heads together ... It's fucking dangerous. It's the oldest play in the book, officers calling in danger

close fire missions to get medals." Casey Kasem keeps screaming about protocol and how Fick needs to put the guys on lockdown and NJP them and whatever, and Nate ignores him, grabbing the phone. Encino Man, if the reflexes in his brain were working correctly, would totally grab it back, but instead they're both left holding it lamely. If Encino Man had a tail, it would have its own brain.

"Sir," Nate says slowly, "Tell me exactly what you're doing." Encino Man just repeats himself again, and Nate explains once more that there's no RPG team. "I called it in. My men destroyed it." Helpfully, Casey Kasem stands a few yards away screaming -- get this shit right here -- "Lieutenant, it doesn't matter if we're right or wrong. You and your men can't disobey orders. An officer who does needs to be relieved of his command!"

"It doesn't matter if we're right or wrong. You and your men can't disobey orders. An officer who does needs to be relieved of his command." Does that shit make sense to you?

"Sir," Nate emphasizes, without letting go of the phone, "I'm merely trying to pass you accurate information. There is no hunter-killer RPG team." He lets it go. "What is your order, sir?" You guessed it. "I'm calling in a fire mission." Nate can't believe it, but Encino Man keeps talking, slow as slow: "At ... Papa Quebec 059... 098, 038 degrees, 200 meters." Nate doesn't blink. "Aye aye, sir," he says, and walks away. Look at the sky.

As Encino Man calls it in, Face is all, "So... Do we get ready to be bombed or what?" Nate shakes his head. "There won't be a fire mission. Hitman's using the wrong protocols." Face nods, and explains it to Doc: "Hitman has the grids all designated wrong. There won't be a fire mission." Doc delights in the irony of actually having their asses saved by the incompetence for once, and everybody's too tired to even deal with it so they all just kind of stare and wander away.

Later, the air strike team asks Encino Man to reconfirm his grid zone designator, and his awesome response over comms? "Um... What do you mean?" They finally get it and you can hear the weariness in the guy's voice: "Stand by, Hitman." Patterson's air strike gets cleared, though, and everybody watches a bunch of buildings blow up. Patterson worries about the civilian casualties, but I mean, at least they didn't throw missiles directly at themselves. I guess that's good.

Prayers go out over the speakers in the town as Ray watches the buildings go. "Guess it pays to have the right protocols when you're calling in a fire mission," Espera says grimly. Everybody stares at the town, guns at the ready, and soon enough bullets start flying at them, freaking Evan out. Brad waits to see muzzle flashes, which of course pisses off Trombley, but Brad doesn't even explain it, just keeps looking. Ray spots some guys, and Brad clears the teams, and they open fire. Everybody's screaming, grinning wildly, Manimal and Walt are gritting their teeth as they shoot, the building is ripped apart, and Walt almost kisses his gun for finally working. "Damn, sucker," says Ray. "I just got some. Look at me, Brad. I'm a man now. Prayer

again. Just like you... Except I don't look like a faggot and talk all educated." Brad rolls his eyes and takes off; Espera comes in behind him and settles down beside Ray, who blows him a kiss.

Nate drops beside Evan, behind the Humvee, glowing and excited. "Most people in America right now probably think of Iraq as a dangerous country. Now, if I were to stand up, I might be killed. But to us, behind this wheel, it's pretty safe. So to us, Iraq is a safe country, right here. I feel pretty safe. Do you feel safe?" Evan laughs and admits he feels pretty safe, and Nate slaps his shoulder, giddy, and runs. "See? It's all relative."

The prayers continue, as the tanks roll past Recon. "The natives are getting restless," Brad says, and Nate says prayer is good: "Maybe it'll keep them too preoccupied to shoot at us." They talk about how stupid it is that Nate might get in big trouble for the thing with Encino Man, and Nate's like, "I'll have the right to address any allegations before anything is formalized. I'm assured of this." You can tell he's just mouthing that last bit these days. "Sir, to highlight my growing lack of confidence in the strategic plan, can you explain why we are strong-pointing this hostile city in tin-plated Humvees while M-1 tanks, LAVs and Amtracs roll past? Isn't it supposed to be the other way around?" Nate nods, weirded out and sad. "I mean, how exactly did this happen?" The tanks roll past and Nate says he wouldn't believe him if he said how it happened, and then runs off. Nate doesn't like to talk about that stuff. It's hard being in the middle.

Rudy's in his weird suit and feeling philosophical. "There's no plan for this, Pap. Strong-pointing a walled town with Humvees. It all feels so random, what we're doing. Running here, shooting, running there, bombing. That might be a legit target burning over there; it might be a school, Pap. I hope it's legit, I hope this is good karma." They watch a man herding sheep. "Everything here is ancient, Pap. We're in an old, old place." Pappy agrees, and spits.

A group approaches Alpha, waving flags: you can see a kid in one man's arms. Patterson goes down to meet them, and the guy cries out to him in stilted English, while the child groans in pain. "Help please. Help. Saddam... Fedayeen shoot. Not you, Saddam. You kill Ba'ath party, Saddam, very good. Saddam in our city, shooting at you. Not us. We help... come. I'll show you. Come." The man takes hold of Patterson's sleeve; he gets ready to go with him. A guy comes running up just then and Patterson tells him to call Battalion so he can report this, but they're already on the net: "Godfather wants to see you."

And why? So he can talking about how fuckin' amazing Encino Man, of all people, is. And if you have trouble wrapping your head around that shit, take a look at Encino Man's confused face. He barely knows it's Godfather talking. If he had a tail with a tiny brain in it, it would be wagging. "In Ar Rifa, this Commander taught us something about seizing the initiative. Earlier today, when his company came under

attack by Fedayeen paramilitary forces, laying in ambush with RPGs, he chose to stop and bring the fight to them. Captain Patterson, greetings." Patterson, breathless, asks for Meesh: "We just knocked out the Ba'ath headquarters. We have an opportunity..." Godfather holds up a fucking finger, because he'll be damned if anybody actually acts like they're involved with reality while he's giving a bullshit speech that has nothing to do with anything except glorifying his own retarded choices.

"There's a school of thought that says we shouldn't have stopped, particularly given the proximity to a hostile city. But this kind of aggressiveness is what I mean by interrupting the enemy's own decision-making cycle." Patterson is almost doing the pee-pee dance, he's so cockblocked right now; Encino Man is grinning dimly like Sloth; Sixta is nodding like a moron at nothing. Just nothing. Just more ballast for the bullshit, like Godfather is right here in front of you inventing the Art of fucking War. "It's against all doctrine, but as the General often reminds me, doctrine is the last refuge of the unimaginative." Oh, right. Your close personal friend General Chaos. What did you find up his ass today? Was it shiny?

"The fact is I just got off the nets with Chaos, and the General is impressed with our initiative. We are on his radar screen. Gentlemen, we're coming out from beneath all this ass and getting back into the game. And he's given us a tasker." Encino Man nods stupidly, as though he's been asked a question; Sixta has an orgasm with its own retard strength; Patterson is about to actually scream. "This is the Qal'at Sukkar airfield. A British paratroop regiment is staging to hit the field at dawn. The General has advised me that they are running late, and he suggested -- if we're up for it -- that we can get to the field first. To do this, we have to cross 40 kliks. Godfather needs an airfield," he finishes up, like they're going to bring it to him as a gift. Sixta nods stupidly, because that's exactly what it is. He's such a fucking toady it makes my stomach hurt. "Sir," Patterson says, now that Godfather's finally fucking shut up; Godfather seems surprised that Patterson has anything to add. "We've good intelligence from the locals on the Ba'athist and Republican Guard units in this town. We can exploit the information..." Godfather cuts him off again, because God forbid you actually do something with strategic value when you could be sloppily fellating the General, who will never, ever, ever, ever care one way or the other. "-- No time. We're pulling out in the next hour. See to it, gentlemen."

Meesh is doing his usual gross runaround lying spin with the people, and Nate's finally had it: "Meesh, seriously, what's this guy trying to tell me? ...What's he trying to tell me *right now*?" Meesh is so... fucking oily and creepy, he's like the Baron Harkonnen of Arabic translators, slugging his beer and freaking Nate out on that level too: "They want to show us the locations of the Republican Guard, Ba'ath Party, and Fedayeen forces. Maybe some weapon caches, maybe even some chemical weapons." Nate's like, "Awesome, something that actually makes sense in a logical way!" But not so fast, there. "No, no. That's not how we're rolling, eh? We are pulling out of here soon. But rest assured Godfather has a legit plan to exploit the

situation. We are going to give these righteous people IR chemlights. They are going to set them up where the bad guys are, and mark them for the bombers who are going to bomb the shit out of whatever's marked. American Air Force. The best in the world!" He brandishes a briefcase full of chemlights and Nate's like, for real? "How do we know this guy isn't just going to put these chemlights on the homes of people he owes money to? How do we know for sure that he's even on our side, Meesh? How do we know anything unless we properly debrief these people and check their intel?" Meesh's entire fucking answer is to offer him a beer. Nate takes off, because Option B is to punch Meesh's stupid head off, and Meesh says something stupid and sniveling, and takes another beer from some tiny child.

Another lovely sunset, and then there's Ray ranting in the night. "You should write this down, reporter. See, the war's actually not about pussy. It's about NAMBLA. You know: North American Man-Boy Love Association. See, places like Thailand where they used to fuck little boys and shit, they're drying up. We're opening up Iraq for a whole new supply of kids, man..." I still don't entirely get that speech. Sure is creepy, though! Brad stares down at the light of the blue force tracker, and shushes him, but Ray doesn't see the point: "Right! Because we're gonna drive 40 klicks off-road in the dark to an airfield with Republican Guard on it by ourselves." (Guess what?) "And they say that I did too much acid in high school. Christ, the business end of Mattis's crack pipe must be hot to the fucking touch..." Brad hears something, and interrupts Ray's complaints with a terse "Get down." He shoves Ray down, just as the shots ring out. There's major gunfire in the night. It's friendly.

Brad grabs Ray's headset and radios in the friendly fire: Delta, across the street, shooting at us for no reason. "Fucking reservists!" Ray shouts. "I saw the markings." Nate gets on the comms and deals with it, and Brad inclines his head so Evan knows it's him he means, speaking softly: "You all right?" I love it when he does that; so sue me. Evan's shaken but okay, and then he gets even more freaked out by Trombley going *off* about his sudden bizarre certainty that Evan has managed to piss on him across the Humvee with his pants on. Evan's mind is kind of blown by this, and Trombley's shouting, and it's a whole lot like the thing with Q-Tip, only with piss. Of course, the desired result is I don't know what, everybody laughing at Evan for magic-bullet pissing around corners like he's James MacAvoy or something, I don't know. Something to shame him, somebody to shame the POG in the car, the only person lower than the FNG, except for how it won't happen because it doesn't make any sense in the first place. Fucking Trombley. Ray's annoyed too: "They shot our fucking *water cans*," he laughs meanly, and gets moving again, bitching about the water being lost -- Brad watches him drive for awhile, and then all of a sudden they have to stop again. Ray screams about how Godfather's a cocktease, and Brad jumps out to check on this latest disaster.

It's an H&S supply truck who lost a tire to the trigger-happy Delta reservist fuckholes: "It was Shock Trauma! Bunch of fucking doctors, didn't they have to take an oath or some shit against fucking people up?" Good point. I was just thinking how like in most movies you have one asshole that gets in everybody's way, by being

stupid or a prick or whatever, and then you get to hope that this person dies through the whole movie, but in this movie, it's about half and half. I don't even want to see the weirdos in Delta. Brad goes to ask Nate for a team to provide security while they change the tire, and fucking Sixta comes running up talking fifty times as retarded and horrible as usual. "-- Belay that, Devil Dog! Godfather's got a mission, and that mission is now. Abandon this vehicle, put y'asses on another vehicle. Let's get moving. No buts! These asses ain't in gear 10 minutes ago, you's in direct disobedience of a direct order from Godfather hisself!"

He marches off like the incredibly useless fuckhole he always is, and Brad's like, "What's in the truck that we're just going to leave by the side of the road?" The Battalion's *chow*, M-16s, ammo, 400 pounds of C-4, couple of cases of Claymore mines... all kind of shit like that." Sixta screams from afar, "Torklesen!" -- and Brad has to take off because he's so disgusted by this latest idiot move -- "...Get yo bobbies in a runnin truck and load up right now. Y'hear me?" This guy's intonations and pronunciations are so fucking excruciating. I don't know if I can keep listening to him. It's the most annoying thing I've ever heard in my entire life.

Later, driving. No longer riding with useless cargo like food, ammunition, weapons or explosives. Nate asks Brad where the turn is, on comms, and he's like, "Coming right up!" Nate can assure him that Godfather is watching, and I can assure you in my turn that Godfather can suck it. Privately, Brad's like, "Dude, I am so lost right now." Ray's looking totally cute in his NVGs like some kind of virtual reality show from the 90s, chuckling: "Don't worry about it, buddy. I know where we're going. We passed seven villages. There's one more. Hey, do you remember the gay dog episode of South Park? The one where Sparky runs away 'cause he's humping all those other dogs and shit?" Brad is clearly uncomfortable with where this is going, but admits he remembers the episode well. Ray takes the corner like a champ, in the random darkness, and Nate is relieved on comms. "Hey, Brad?" Ray says in a low voice. "Do your Big Gay Al for me." Brad looks at him. "Come on, buddy! Do it for your old pal Ray, the one who made the right turn!" Suddenly Brad is fifty times as Swedish as he has been this whole time -- what is it with the gay thing that turns him back Swedish? -- "...Well, hello there, little pup. I'm Big Gay Al. Have you been outcatht?" Ray is tickled.

Later, Trombley tries once again. "They had this gay bar open up in the town where I'm from in Michigan, and people trashed it every night. They had to

close it after a month." wow man thatsso fucked up dude itlike so hardcore and str8 were yr from ibet did u evr kil a faggot. Which, of course, Ray totally knows, so he nails him with it: "See, but there's money in that, Trombley. Did I tell you I'm gonna open my own gay bar when I get back home? It's gonna be called The Golden Stream, and it's gonna be like this big urinal, right? And there's gonna be this two-way mirror that everybody pisses against. That way when you're sitting at the bar having drinks, there's like all these big fucking giant cocks just pissing right at you." There are very few things that freak me out. I don't mean to brag, but I have seen a pornographic cinema film before, so yeah: I'm pretty bad ass. But OMFG, Ray! Fuckin' what is wrong with you?

Trombley's voice rises about eight octaves for a total of sixty-four notes from where it started: "Corporalareyouafaggot?" This is the food that Ray consumes, and he just screwed Trombley in about six different ways, and he knows it, so he keeps going: "You know what? I'm gonna franchise that shit. You can have Michigan, Trombley. Very lucrative territory, homosexually-speaking." Trombley nearly starts crying from peering into that particular abyss -- the one with the big fucking giant cocks pissing right at you! -- and Brad's like, "Chill, Ray. We want him just crazy enough."

Tiny night scenes: Garza's Kevlar goes bouncing off his head as they bounce over a berm, and Espera tells him they'll hold the funeral for his little hat right around never, and in Team One's Humvee, Ray starts a rousing a capella performance of "Tainted Love," nagging Brad to supply the handclaps before all four of them start singing along, harmonizing, with Trombley tentatively supplying the baseline. Ecstatic. Daytime: Horrible scorpion on a rock. I keep saying, "Mister Scorpion, I will give you a ride across this river if you go bite fucking Sixta, because his voice makes my left eye twitch," but it just sits there. Guess it speaks Arabic.

Godfather stomps around all flaccid and futile, pissed, scaring Sixta and the Young Guy (What is his name? Come on, show!) half to death, because he's so erratic even when he's not decided to get Old Testament pissed for no reason beyond his own incompetence. But if Alpha doesn't get to the airfield for recon, will the General still take Godfather to the fucking Prom? Godfather doesn't fucking want to know the answer to that very important question, and has decided to stomp his little feet until he creates an earthquake that will somehow bounce Patterson's platoon the forty klicks that separates them from the airfield. And the whole time fuckin' Wormtongue Sixta is like, "Freak out, Mommy! Get real mad!"

It's like, did you ever have to go to a not-so-nice daycare? With those ladies with bad teeth and sixteen kids and giant bosoms and they say things like "tough titty" and they always have one daughter who's a year older than you who has mystery stains on her fucking Strawberry Shortcake t-shirt from Salvation Army and she's

always trying to get people in trouble for no reason, because she's a tiny little bitch in training? That's Sixta.

"These guys have bitched and moaned, moaned and bitched that I haven't given them a legitimate recon mission. I finally give them one, and they fucking fail me." So officious and just ... bitchy. But still with the voice, so you have to think about it. His ass got his career made with that voice, because the things he says with it don't sound half as retarded as they should. "We don't have that option. We will recon that field. We will recon it in force. I want the entire Battalion Oscar Mike inside of 10 minutes." Sixta runs off, leaving waves of douche chill in his wake, and Young Guy is like, "Um, that's not even recon, that's a straight up assault." On a Republican Guard airfield, manned by four thousand troops, which your superiors have decided is worth an entire air squadron to neutralize. Godfather, because how dare you, gets in his face, twice as pissed and pissy: "*Semantics*." YG's like, "What about the huge fucking tanks?" Godfather goes, very pithy, "The violence of action is to our advantage." Take that sentence apart like a plastic Easter egg and see all the shit inside it, won't you? "I'll request that division adjust the ROE accordingly." YG gives in, because fuck everything, and Godfather calls Patterson back to base so that he can brief them on the incredibly idiotic thing he's going to do so that Mattis will finally let him sleep at the foot of the fuckin' bed.

Trombley sleepy, Evan sleeping, Brad dozing. Nate runs up and shakes him awake gently, to tell him the stupid news: "Get your team ready, we're assaulting the airfield. Less than 10 mikes." Brad wakes Trombley up and tells Walt to range the Mark-19 as far out as he can handle. Ray's like, "And the recon mission that is the entire point of Alpha today?" Oh no, they fucked that up and Godfather is pissing his panties about it. Ray's like, "Then good morning." Brad: "They fucked it. We're going up against tanks." Marines run around like an anthill; Ray tells Trombley to go number one because he's not stopping once they start driving; Lilley films some dude shitting ("Naked Marine, the Internet loves you!") and Espera hustles him into the truck, noting how gay Lilley just got for no reason, and we're Oscar Mike.

Patterson is horrified to learn that Godfather's gotten the ROE changed -- again -- and basically made the entire airfield region a free-fire zone. He refuses to pass the word along, and everybody drives. A-10s zoom overhead, but Ray can't talk to them. "Goddamn Air Force," Brad says, "They shoot Marines." Ray worries about getting to the bolt cutters in time, if there's a fence, and asks Evan if he can shift fast enough to get them out from under his seat; Brad knows you have to get out of the truck to get them, but Evan persists in mumbling to himself and trying anyway, bumping his ass against the back of Brad's head about eleven humiliating (and scary, the dude's holding a giant gun) times; Walt's gun starts jamming again, and he's jerking and pulling at it with his entire body, like violently, and Brad's like, "Unfuck it now or get on your fucking SAW." Not convenient, this timing.

Trombley seems something. Men running, 200 meters gone, his ten. "Are they armed?" Brad asks. "They're *something*," Trombley says, begging that's vague enough

to get him cleared. The ROE says go, so go. Brad clears him, and Trombley takes some camels out, hooting and cheering himself on, horny and strong and terribly young.

There's a scene now which qualifies as probably the most awesome thing that has so far happened, but is hard to describe. Basically, the Humvees all drive over a hill. I mean, I can't tell you why it is so awesome, but it hits that nerve that causes your kids to beg for that DVD that's three hours of construction trucks moving dirt around. It is viscerally satisfying, not to say fucking thrilling, to watch a bunch of Humvees climb up a hill and go over it. You either understand this statement or you do not; the person who edited this footage *clearly* understands why this is totally awesome.

Less awesome: the actual conquering, which involves a lot of driving onto the empty airfield where people are not, shooting wildly into the nonexistent nothingness, for about a year, even though there are no bad guys or in fact people of any kind anywhere near the airfield, which is totally abandoned, which is what fucking happens when you scrap recon altogether and drive a bunch of excellent Humvees over a fabulous hill into the unknown.

Captain America -- see, he understands about the trucks coming over the hill for real, he lives there, it's the one brain cell that actually works -- runs out with his fucking bayonet deployed, shooting at nothing but scraps of random metal and doing this hilarious three-steps-forward, wave his men (who are totally disinterested and seated comfortably watching him spazz out) forward, three more steps, wave the men, all, "Follow my tracers!" Follow them *where*, you enormous dildo? Onto the empty pavement of the wide-open parking lot you are currently conquering? He's like the Aryan version of Don Quixote, plus a lobotomy. I've never seen those romance shows on VH-1 where the people try to date someone disgusting, but that's what he reminds me of. I think ... that I am falling in gay love with Captain America.

"Can you believe that fucking retard is in charge of people?" asks Ray. He comes running back with his eyes crossed screaming about how his team needs to engage these random civilian huts that are 3000 meters away, doing nothing but minding their own business while a bunch of white people act like fuckheads on the tarmac. The gunner's like, "That's more than 3000 meters away? Range of my fifty is 1830?" Captain America has no time for your mathematical faggotry! Captain America wants to shoot guns! At things! Now! Engage! Engage! Engage! He runs off to do who knows what, something awesome, and Kocher's like, "Yeah, no. Have a snack."

Everybody basically stands around for awhile wondering if they are cool or not. Ray already knows, personally: "Yeah, looks like Saddam's big bad Republican Guard hajjis got wind I was coming. As the great warrior-poet Ice Cube once said, 'If the day does not require an AK, it is good.'" Brad notes somberly that if they'd actually

been, you know, here and manning the tanks, everybody would be dead without even a warning. Um, yeah. That's why I spell "reconnaissance" with a capital "Not until I fucking know for sure."

Ray tells him to lighten up, and Brad looks from the Marines climbing all over the tanks, taking pictures of each other like it's a field trip, to Ray. "Then again, the world wouldn't have to deal with the prospect of you returning to your cretinous daughter-fucking trailer-park red-state shithole and producing mutant, whiskey tango, scrotum-faced, bucktoothed, zit-exploding progeny." Ray almost passes out with pleasure, predictably, and Trombley's like, "Heads up." Because guess who's standing behind Brad suddenly? Godfather! Who is so convinced of his own rightness that he would never even think to connect the dots of "we should all be standing here dead" with "Godfather ordered us to take this heavily-armed military base blind." His arms are akimbo, like the perfect asshole that he is, and get a load of this shit right here:

"Chaos, this is Godfather. Be advised, we have seized the enemy airfield. Early reports are we've captured several enemy tanks and self-propelled triple-a batteries. It appears that we've overrun the entire 255th Mechanized Regiment, who have fled. And sir? [*self-aggrandizing drama queen pause*] We've sustained zero casualties." He almost cries at Mattis's approval, and takes off. Evan looks up, asking Godfather if the Brits are coming. "No," he says proudly. "We scrubbed their mission. We got here first." Godfather, you have become a perfect buffoon. Brad admits quietly to his team that, vanishing Others or no, they just seized an enemy airfield, which is pretty fucking ninja. Ray laughs and Brad smiles wide.

In a scene intended to viscerally show us that keeping your shoes on for weeks at a time is both horrifying and required by the USMC in this circumstance, Doc deals with Chaffin's feet. But you know who's not dealing with Chaffin's feet? This guy. Next.

Nate calls in the team leaders and tells them they're so far ahead of RCT-1, they can chill for a good 24 hours before they show up. They have to keep 50% watch just in case *this area they have no idea or intel about and which moments ago contained 4000 Republican Guard guys* turns out to be dangerous. Pappy asks if they've discussed destroying the weapons and ordnance on the base, and Nate gives that deadpan thing he's so good at: "Actually, that did come up. But it seems the Battalion's supply of C-4 is now unaccounted for. The Battalion supply truck we left last night, it is a smoldering heap of twisted metal and failed hopes in the trustworthiness of the Iraqis we are striving so hard to liberate." Face is like, "Huh?" and Nate secretly rolls his eyes, deep inside himself where nobody can see. "It means we're on one meal a day."

Ray lounges under a big cammy-net setup, waxing smartassical and being totally cool and funny. Walt and Garza are openly loving it, but Brad's smiling a very secret, very huge smile while he rants. "I'm just saying I'm surprised is all, Brad. I mean,

aren't you surprised? I'm betting that they were thinking that they could just, you know, leave a fully-loaded supply truck laying around, just like you could anywhere in America, you know? I mean, you park your unlocked car in Detroit or Baltimore, I mean, your shit's gonna be there guaranteed when you get back from the day spa with your skin all exfoliated and shit, right? I mean seriously, homes, why would our Iraqi brethren want 400 pounds of C-4, claymores and crates of M-16s? I mean, it just doesn't make any sense. Or wait, you know, they could be using all that C-4 for, like, a giant Fourth of July celebration." Cutely: "What do you think, Brad?" Still grinning, Brad tells him it's time to shut up.

Some First Platoon guys, I think, show up and start needling FNG about the camel deaths. Trombley's like, "UM, I TOTALLY KILLED SOME HUMAN BEINGS TOO. I AM SORRY ABOUT THE INNOCENT CAMELS, BUT THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT I MURDERED SOME PEOPLE TOO. THANK YOU." Brad tells them to fuck off and go write up their complete failure to find the airfield in any way. Trombley feels good about himself for a second. Uh oh.

Fucking Sixta shows up all slow-burn eye-twitchingly nails-on-chalkboard fuckfacedly and yells at Garza for approximately a thousand years about the lost helmet, turning it into a tirade on Iceman about how this is why Grooming Standards blah blah, and Iceman's like, "Roger." Sixta gives him a wink -- "You know this is how Sergeant Majors roll, right? We get it, right?" -- and takes off. Except the way in which he is a mentally impaired cocksucker has zero to do with Sergeant Majoring and everything to do with how I want a time machine so I can go drown him like a kitten and save the world from his horrible ass. "I'm not the fucking retard who lost a whole supply truck," Garza notes, causing Ray to giggle madly, and lighting up Brad's entire face. Word.

Evan spots some people dragging a boy on a sheet, wailing in the distance. "One humanitarian ration for two blowjobs," Chaffin says, "That's the going rate in this part of the world." If I thought his racist white trash ass could even spell "humanitarian," I'd think twice about defining it for him, but really he's just a write-off. On the other end of the spectrum, Doc fires himself from his hero cannon directly at the people at the speed of wonderful, dragging a Marine called Stiney with him.

He kneels at the boy's side, mother wailing on the other, and touches his face. "Hey buddy, can you hear me? Good." Guys start running up; he cuts the kid's shirt and ascertains the caliber. "Marines shot this kid. Fucking jackasses. Trigger-happy motherfucker." Stiney, heart breaking, runs off to find the Battalion surgeon. "We need to casevac this kid or he's dead," says Doc, and goes back to the kid. There's another injury nearby; Q-Tip and Stafford arrive with stretchers, also freaked out. "You're a very brave kid," he says, all the comfort in his tone, and looks at the mom. "He's very strong, all right?" The surgeon clears the other patient -- calf shot, no arterial bleeding -- and Evan watches, just as upset as everybody else. "Why aren't they angry?" Meesh says his usual bullshit, and Doc's like, fucking stop. "We're

fucking Recon Marines! Our whole fucking job is to *observe*. Not make these kinds of mistakes. And we don't fucking shoot unarmed kids." Evan asks where it happened, and Meesh finds out: "Dude, they were tending their camels and shit, so who knows where it was." Q-Tip starts shaking. "Fuck, man. Trombley did this."

Doc Bryan's so angry all the time that when you shovel some more on top, all he can do is laugh. It sounds like metal on metal. Stiney is freaking. Doc confers with the surgeon as Nate comes running up: "Godfather's denied the request to casevac the boy." Um, no, because that's how we kill a child. The surgeon offers to go ask again, and Doc thanks him. "Shot by that asshole Trombley, Brad. He's been zipped by 556 from Trombley's SAW." Brad's helpless look goes deeper than ever; his eyes look burned and sunken. "Don't put this on Trombley. I'm responsible." Doc angrily points out the twenty other Marines that managed to drive past them without shooting, and suggests the perfectly reasonable idea of at least bringing Trombley to see what he did. I think that's an excellent idea. When we had knives and swords you had to look people in the eye. Guns are just like TV. For Trombley, guns *are* TV. Generation Kill. But Brad knows it would just twist him further. "Don't say that. It was my order. What can I do here?" And I don't know if it's the line or the way the actor says it, but: "Not a fucking thing, apparently, Brad." There's your Emmy. I guarantee you. What a perfect fucking scene.

Brad wobbles on his pins, knife twisted, as the surgeon returns shaking his head. Nate keeps hope alive, and the surgeon's like, "Under the rules, we have to provide him with care until he dies." He immediately comes up with the idea of taking him home: he's billeted next to Godfather. "If he's in my care and Godfather has to watch him die, he might change his order." Doc doesn't even think about it: this is exactly his style. And the way that you can tell is that it's good. Doc is good. They heft the board and carry it down a berm toward Battalion, like pallbearers at a funeral. Trombley sits inside a cave and watches them go by; he doesn't get it. And then he does.

Brad's in front of the party, with Doc, when fucking Sixta comes out hissing and spitting like Aunt Bea. "What the hell is going on here?" he screeches, and Doc doesn't blink. "We brought him here to die." Sixta lamely orders them to get him out of there as Young Guy comes out of the tent. Nate cocks his head at Q-Tip and they carry the boy a couple meters away to the surgeon's area, start him on a drip. "Sergeant Major, what the fuck is going on?" Sixta gets his tattletale face on and stands proud next to Godfather. "Sir. Bravo Two in rebellion. Because they thinks they shot an Iraqi child." Q-Tip and the surgeon tend to the boy, quietly, while the rest face off.

"You're requesting that I send this wounded civilian to the RCT for aid? Problem. Our tactical situation is extremely precarious here. These are the northernmost Marines' positions. And we are 30 klicks north of them. We are far behind enemy lines. We have incomplete intel as to the disposition of the Iraqi units here, here and here.

We don't even know what happened to the 4,000 troops that were at this airfield six hours ago. And there's only 350 of us. What can be done? Option one: casevac by helicopter. Doesn't exist. Army, Marines are engaged. Taking casualties." Doc doesn't take his eyes off Godfather. "Last night the Iraqis stopped the Army advance. They turned back 36 Apache helicopters, shot a few down. Option two: I detach a platoon and have them drive 30 klicks -- through enemy lines -- to the shock-trauma unit here. If any of you were a casualty right now, I don't think I could casevac you. But supposing I could, I imagine there are some of you think we have to give wounded civilians every consideration we would give ourselves. That is not true. The ROE say we have to give them the same medical care they would get by local standards. The standards here are fucking zero. It's a shitty situation for us, but nobody put a gun to our heads and forced us to come here. We're all volunteers."

Are they buying it? Are they buying it? Ten full seconds go by. They don't blink, don't move, don't relax. Just look. Just look at this man. It's a long ten seconds. I timed it. They don't have to pretend, or put anything into their eyes: this isn't about guilt. This is about standing. Continuing to stand.

Godfather orders Patterson to dispatch a platoon from Alpha to take the boy to Shock-Trauma. Funny how the impossible becomes possible when men look at you that way. You could do a lot worse in life than be taught manhood by men like Nate and Brad and Bryan. A lot fucking worse.

Brad and Doc look at each other, two sides of the same coin. Brad's anger is the gas in the Iceman engine, and Doc's is the coal in the tinderbox, but they're both angry all the time, and they're both right. They stalk away. In the dark, in a warcamp that looks like anytime, *Western Front, Platoon*, anything, Wynn huddles the team up.

"We made a mistake today," says Nate. You can see it in his eyes: he knows how this sounds to Trombley, how it's going to hit the bumper and bounce right off. But you have to try. "Collectively and individually. We must get past this. Can't sit around and call it quits now. We have fighting ahead."

Wynn nods. "Look, guys, we're Americans. We must make sure when we take a shot that we are threatened. You gotta see that these people are just like you. You gotta see past the huts, the camels, the different clothes they wear." Trombley's lips go tight: the sky is blue. The sky is blue. The sky is blue. "These are people in this fucking country. This family here might lose a son. We shot their camels too. One camel could be a year's income to them. We're not here to destroy their way of life."

"Trombley," Nate says gently, "You have to be prepared for the possibility of a formal investigation in this shooting. You need to write it up." Wynn slaps his shoulder as they go: "Keep your head up."

Trombley asks Brad if it's going to turn out okay. "I mean, this 'investigation'? Brad tells him he'll be fine, but Trombley gets a look in his eye, talks slow, portentously,

biting his lip. He's playing an angle, at the least. I can't tell what, because I think Trombley is creepy all the time, but maybe this time it's intentional: "No, I mean for you, Sergeant, since you gave the all orders." His tone changes, completely, in a split second; his entire posture changes. He's just a little boy. "I don't care about any of this, you know? I'll be out in a couple of years. But you... Sergeant, this is your career." Either way, Brad's not impressed. "I'll be fine," says the Iceman, and Trombley leaves with a creepy smile. And Ray and Brad, they take a good, long look at each other.

Later, Ray's keeping Walt company while he does something to something: "I don't want to sound like I'm defending Trombley or anything, but ... How come nobody remembers that they declared everybody hostile? I mean, they told us to shoot at everybody." Walt's like, Which was retarded, but think about this: "Trombley only shot two bursts maybe seven rounds. I mean, we're bumping down a dirt road, his targets are like 200 meters out and he hits exactly what the fuck he's shooting at? I mean fuck, man. The boy is a cold-on deadeye killer." And drink, because this is miles away Ray's worst acting for the entire episode, and it makes the non-Sixta eye twitch every time: "Yeah, no shit. That's 'cause he's a psycho. But at least he's our psycho." Oh, Ziggy. Why are you such an acting enigma? One minute you're Lydia Deetz, Veronica Sawyer, and the next you're Mina Harker. I cannot handle it. You are screwby.

Screwby means something awesome/Screwby means something awful. Screwby means success/failure, glory/futility, heroism/cruelty. (Captain America and my abiding passion for him, that's the opposite of screwby: something so terrible that you can't look away.) War is screwby; this is screwby. I don't smoke pot because I have a secret Espera buried deep inside me that has all kinds of theories that nobody wants to hear about. My little Pinko Poke. And he says this:

It is hard for me to reconcile the screwby of war because of men like Fick and Colbert: war -- pure war, the art of war, the state of war, the eternal and undying unfortunate truth and fact of war -- makes them beautiful. Or they make war beautiful. There is something glorious, and pure, in applying your strength solely so that other people can live. There is an innate need for strength and the war inside to prove itself: to protect, to serve by protecting. To love that way. I can't get away from the jargon and the worn out ... Okay, how about this?

"A mother's love for her child is like nothing else in the world. It knows no law, no pity. It dares all things and crushes down remorselessly all that stands in its path."

Agatha Christie said that. When I talk about war, that's all I'm saying. That's her war. We venerate that love, that passion, that fire; it's inviolate, when you turn it around like that. But that's what it's like, if you're doing it right. But the screwby is that nobody is the paragon that they want to be, they get tired or selfish or stupid; and worse, there are people who don't even want to be that: and those are generally the ones that are actually fighting. If you're not officer material, you get

turned into a thing, and if anybody cared what happened after that, they'd see what they did, and they'd never stop thinking about it.

The screwby is that, from a not-too-bizarre angle, the military is a machine for killing our surplus poor people. The military is an engine whose purpose is the procurement of mineral rights and industrial manufacturing contracts for the most evil men in the world. The military is a violent institution populated by the vacuous, the venal and the forgotten. That's the screwby. War is good/war is bad: Screwby.

Evan is digging a hole. Or he was, until he was completely exhausted. There's fire in the distance, and radios going wild. Brad asks him if he's okay, and he smiles. "Just...sucking wind." Brad smiles and goes dark. He thinks, looks up, tries to get to Evan's eyes. "What happened today..."

Brad holds his gaze for awhile, but the words don't come. He looks away; it's awful. Iceman takes over. "You need to square those walls. You'll never make any progress digging that way."

Protocol. Standards. Brad's SOP: hospital corners and square walls, so you don't go crazy. So the endless digging doesn't pull you in after it. You'll never make any progress digging that way. Square those walls/never stop digging. Brad walks up, up the hill, and away. Evan continues to dig.